

The LANGUAGE of FOOD



A conversation with George Vutetakis

by Renee Rudzewicz

George Vutetakis was first exposed to the language of food as a young boy in his Greek grandmother Yia Yia's kitchen. It was here that he experienced the importance of cultural traditions in cooking through extraordinary flavors, tastes and smells. His passion for food continued as he traveled and studied in India, learning traditional food preparation methods. After years of managing many kitchens, running a restaurant in Manhattan and cooking for hundreds in India and America, Vutetakis found himself as head chef at Inn Season Café in Royal Oak, MI. After being chef and owner for almost two decades, he left the restaurant to pursue teaching and writing. Here, he discusses what healthy living means to him, the importance of honest foods and his cookbook *Vegetarian Traditions*, a collaboration of his culinary history with some of his most treasured recipes.

What does healthy eating mean to you?

For me, healthy eating is not just looking specifically at what you're eating, but it's a lifestyle choice. My experience in

studying and cooking with other cultures has enabled me to embrace the idea that food is a celebration, not just something you eat. It is just as important as exercise or sleep and is a part of our life that we tend to neglect. Food is one of the most intimate things in our lives because it is tied into our emotions. Eating healthy is a relationship that you form with food, so if you build a healthy relationship with the foods you eat then you will have a healthy lifestyle. For example, going to your local farmer's market or maintaining your own garden allows us to become part of the process in terms of healthy eating. We become partners in utilizing these fresh ingredients pulled straight from the ground. When we have a healthy balance of food, we maintain a balanced lifestyle, and that starts by treating the food we eat with respect.

How have the different cultures and traditions of other countries influenced your own cooking and traditions?

Cooking is a tradition that is passed down from generation to generation. The heart of learning how to prepare food is respecting that ritual. There are so many cultures to learn from and we all have our stories and family recipes. It's about looking back on generations, not just foreign cultures, and really appreciating that aspect. My father taught me to understand the value of people's presence. With America being such a melting pot, we are influenced from multiple cultures. We tend to adopt the mentality that food is a commodity. Other cultures have a long history of cherishing food as sacred nourishment and valuing what it stands for. It's a relationship they have with the earth. Because I was able to travel to India, I latched on to their culinary culture. I studied in people's homes and temples and learned many of the Eastern philosophies that I was able to adopt in my own life.

What do you believe is the key to living a healthy life?

Food. Knowing your food. Once you begin to know what you're eating (instead of the food we buy packaged at the store with an overload of foreign ingredients), then you begin to take the next steps of regeneration on the planet. To sustain a better quality of life, we must make the most of our time with food. When you buy corn or lettuce from your local farmers market, you are purchasing something that was in the ground less than 24 hours ago. When you pick a tomato from your own garden to use for that evening's meal, you are creating that synergy between you and the earth. The more we learn to appreciate the food we eat, the better we will be in maintaining a healthy life.

What is one piece of advice you can give people about cooking?

To me, cooking is a language. It's a way of expressing. There is an understanding about how food comes together. There is also the creative aspect. When you are preparing to cook, think about the ingredients you are using and the recipe you are duplicating. It's about having a relationship with the food

we eat and being part of the process. The journey begins in the ground where the ingredients are grown and then to our kitchens where they are cooked and prepared. I always shop local and buy organic and I encourage others to do the same when it comes to the items that I am cooking.

What made you decide to write your book, *Vegetarian Traditions*?

The book was a work in progress that took over 10 years to complete. I have had people requesting me for years to write a cookbook but there was never enough time. After I left Inn Season Café, I decided my main focus was going to create a cookbook that is one hundred percent vegan. I wanted to create a cookbook that healthy cuisine that any person, carnivorous or not, could enjoy. The dishes that I have created in here have a history. There are traditional methods of preparation to make each dish. There was the unspoken motto at Inn Season Café, "Quality of food is synonymous with quality of life". Every ingredient used at the restaurant and also in my cookbook is healthy – it's just a question of how you use it. Each section has an introduction about the foods and spices I use and why. I have also incorporated some of the famous dishes from Inn Season Café in my book.

George Vutetakis currently lives in San Diego, where he has strong relationships with local organic farmers. Vegetarian Traditions is available at several Michigan businesses and on Amazon.com. For details or to order a copy, visit his blog, TheVegetarianGuy.com.

Renee Rudzewicz is a freelance writer in Metro Detroit. Her work has appeared in Traverse Magazine, Hour Detroit Magazine and Corp! magazine. She is currently finishing up her first novel. Contact her at renee.rudzewicz@gmail.com.

Roasted Stuffed Polenta

Polenta is often a creamy, pudding-like dish; Roasted Stuffed Polenta is a firmer version which may be prepared as a light main course.



Serves 8

Polenta

- 2 3/4 cups water
- 2 tablespoons leeks, finely minced
- 2 tablespoons carrots, minced
- 1/2 cup corn off the cob
- 1 bay leaf
- 1/4 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 cup organic medium ground corn meal

In a sauce pan on medium heat, add water, leeks, carrots, corn, bay leaf and salt. Simmer broth for five minutes. Slowly stir in corn meal and cook until it thickens. Transfer to a double-boiler on medium-high heat and cook, stirring frequently, for 30 minutes. Transfer to a parchment-lined baking sheet, flatten to 1/4 inch thick and let rest for at least 30 minutes. Cut polenta into 4 inch squares and then angle-cut into triangles.

Baking Sauce

- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1 1/2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 tablespoon tamari
- 1/4 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Mix together all baking sauce ingredients and spread onto a parchment-lined baking sheet. Place individual polenta pieces on the sauce and bake for 15 to 20 minutes or until edges are browned. Remove from oven and



INSPIRE UPLIFT EMPOWER

Massage ⇨ Reiki ⇨ Craniosacral Therapy
⇨ Life Coaching ⇨ Meditation ⇨ Gifts
⇨ Aromatherapy Classes and much more

248-236-9855 • 20 Hudson St • Oxford

July Specials:
\$5.00 off
Reiki Treatment

\$5.00 off
Aroma-Touch Massage

Full schedule on our website
www.Soothe-Your-Soul.com



Experience Gentle Chiropractic Care Without the Cracking or Popping

KST is very gentle and yet powerful. Patients usually notice dramatic changes from the first visit.
Patients suffering from these symptoms have had great results from KST:

- Sciatica • Migraines • Chronic Pain • Thoracic Hump
- Disc Problems • Depression • Dyslexia • Autism
- Sleeping Difficulties • Ear Infections • Much More

Van Every Family Chiropractic Center
4203 Rochester Rd • Royal Oak
www.VanEveryChiropractic.com  **248-616-0900**

Most insurances accepted

allow to cool.

Basil Pesto

- 2 cups loosely packed fresh basil leaves
- 1/2 cup pine nuts
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 teaspoon sea salt

Puree all basil pesto ingredients in a food processor until it becomes a paste with texture. Spread pesto on half the polenta triangles and place the remaining halves on top, sandwich-style. Toast in a 400 degree F oven for 8 minutes just before serving.

Serving suggestion: Serve with *Tuscan White Beans* and *Roasted Asparagus*. (Recipes for both are available in the *Vegetarian Traditions* cookbook). Place 1 cup of beans in the center of a plate. Put one Roasted Stuffed Polenta on the beans and arrange 3 spears of asparagus across the top of it in a fan pattern. Sprinkle red bell peppers around perimeter of the plate.

Recipe and photo courtesy of George Vutetakis, from the Vegetarian Traditions cookbook.

Win a signed copy of the **Vegetarian Traditions** cookbook by George Vutetakis!

Natural Awakenings East Michigan is giving away two FREE personally autographed copies of *Vegetarian Traditions*.



Details & enter online at: MHLAS.com/vegetarian-traditions -or mail your complete name, address and phone number to Natural Awakenings Drawings, PO Box 283, Oxford, MI 48371, to arrive by July 31, 2010. *Make sure you mention Vegetarian Traditions!*

Yes YOU CAN reverse heart disease without...surgery!

Is Your Doctor Right For You?

Statins aren't for everybody!

reverse heart disease without...surgery!

There are alternatives to drugs, invasive procedures, and surgery. Attend our presentation to discover all of your options. Get your questions answered and get back to the life you deserve!

For More Information on Our Presentations, Programs and Consultations

Call 586-795-3600

Join Dr. Dangovian for an informative presentation on:



The Simple TRUTH:

3 Things You Can Do to Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease.



Dr. M. Dangovian

Wellness
TRAINING INSTITUTE



Rochester

Sat, July 24th • 11:00 AM

See related ads pages 17 & 55.

healthy heart & vascular PLLC

www.healthyheartandvascular.com

Michael Dangovian, D.O., F.A.C.C.

39242 Dequindre, Ste 103,
Sterling Heights, MI 48310
North of 17 Mile,
East side of Dequindre